Pentecostalism and Speaking in Tongues in Methodist Church Nigeria, Archdiocese of Uyo

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Abstract

One of the aspects of Pentecostal praxis that have become attractive to mainline Christian denominations in Nigeria is speaking in tongues. Incidentally, it is a cardinal belief in Pentecostalism that regeneration must be followed by a baptism in the Holy Spirit, with initial evidence of speaking in tongues. Methodist Church Nigeria, Archdiocese of Uyo, part of world Methodism that was birthed through the missionary activities of the Primitive Methodist Society in Nigeria towards the close of the 19th century, has not been left out in this wind of change. However, the extent to which Methodist Church Nigeria, Archdiocese of Uyo has been influenced by Pentecostalism in the area of speaking in tongues has not been ascertained, hence the need for this study. Phenomenological and

descriptive methods of research were used to gather data through questionnaire and interviews in addition to the use of secondary sources such as books and journals. The findings show that Pentecostalism has influenced the study area in two major ways. First, the consciousness of the need for charismatic Christianity has created a convivial atmosphere for baptism in the Holy Spirit and speaking in tongues within the Methodist Church. Again, many Methodist members have affirmed that their initiatory experiences at speaking in tongues were within Pentecostal settings, and that such settings also keep the fire of charismatic manifestation in their lives aglow. Moreover, the age range of those who speak in tongues within the study area points to the possibility of an increasing population of Methodists speaking in tongues in the near future. The study concludes that with the exposure of more Methodists to Pentecostal settings and atmospheres in campuses, places of work and neighbourhoods, more and more Methodist people will speak in tongues or at least be favourably disposed to the phenomenon.

1.0 Introduction

In recent times, there has been growing scholarly interest over the renewed use of glossolalia in some parts of the Universal Church. Also, the phenomenon of speaking in tongues as presented by Luke and Paul the apostle in the New Testament, has been a major point of divergence between the historic mainline churches and the Pentecostal churches. Expectedly, the interest in this area of the New Testament charismata, especially championed by the Pentecostals, has not gone without questioning, skepticism, and even opposition from those of the mainline bloc. However, the phenomenal growth of Pentecostalism in Nigeria and other parts of the world beginning at the second half of the 20th Century makes it difficult if not impossible for the movement and its characteristic features to be totally ignored even by those who initially viewed it with skepticism.

Efforts by the leaderships of most of the mainline churches to curb this 'menace' (as they saw it at the outset) in the church proved abortive. The mainline Christian denominations in Nigeria therefore began to think of ways to accommodate the movement in order to keep their members who had identified with the charismatics, hence the birth of fellowships like Evangelical Fellowship in the Anglican Communion (EFAC) (Achinuke in Kanu, 2012) within the Anglican

Communion and Methodist Evangelical Movement in Methodist Church Nigeria. Methodist Evangelical Movement is a renewal movement that "shares generally the basic beliefs and doctrines of the Worldwide Charismatic Movement" (Ekebuisi, 2010:175). This movement has situated the Pentecostal experience in Methodist Church Nigeria, Archdiocese of Uyo to a certain degree. This is to the extent that some within the Methodist Church now report experiences that used to be heard only among the Pentecostals, such as speaking in tongues.

The thesis of this paper is that, in addition to those who claim to have received the initiatory charismatic experience of baptism in the Holy Spirit within the Methodist circle and now speak in tongues in the Archdiocese of Uyo (whose charismatic experiences were borne out of an already existing Pentecostal influence on the Methodist Church), there are those whose initiatory experiences were gotten outside Methodist circles, that is, in Pentecostal or allied settings. The paper therefore argues that, although the founder of Methodism John Wesley was favourably disposed to the charismata, the present trend of speaking in tongues by some of the Methodists in Uyo is largely attributable, directly or indirectly, to the influence of Pentecostalism.

2.0 Pentecostalism

The concept of Pentecostalism which, according to Asamoah-Gyadu has become the "third force" of Christianity (2013:2), has been viewed from a variety of theological lenses. It has enjoyed a lot of definitions, most of which emphasize the content of its theology. In fact, it has become fashionable to define the concept by naming its major constituent beliefs and practices. Asamoah-Gyadu, one of the leading scholars of African Pentecostalism, defines Pentecostals as:

> Christian groups which emphasize salvation in Christ as a transformative experience wrought by the Holy Spirit and in which pneumatic phenomena including 'speaking in tongues', prophecies, visions, healing and miracles in general, perceived as standing in historic continuity with the experiences of the early church as found especially in the Acts of the Apostles, are sought, accepted, valued, and consciously encouraged among members as signifying the presence of God and experiences of his Spirit (2005:12).

Liardon, qualifying some of the experiences quoted above, says, "Pentecostal worship is characterized by praying in tongues, prophesying, healings, hand-clapping, and dynamic preaching, which are all enjoyed with great zeal and fervency; this worship style divides Pentecostals from other mainline Christian denominations" (2006:11). Commenting on the Pentecostal emphasis on speaking in tongues, Musoni asserts that the Pentecostals arguably conclude that speaking in tongues is the pattern set for the universal Church by the New Testament Church (2014).

The spread of this movement has been so phenomenal that Stephenson observes: "In less than a century it has become a global force in Christianity with significant representations on every continent" (2009:1). Locating the phenomenon within the historical framework of Christianity, Asamoah-Gyadu avers:

> Pentecostalism, the most globalized form of pneumatic Christianity, belongs to the larger Protestant family, and it shares the traditional evangelical theological emphases on the authority of the Bible, the centrality of the cross, regeneration as the way to Christian salvation, and a call to holiness as the outflow of a new relationship with Christ (2013:2).

Asamoah-Gyadu is also of the opinion that Pentecostalism developed because historic mainline Protestantism took an intellectual and liberal attitude to the Scriptures and in the process neglected the experiential elements of Christianity. Their attitude has been explained as partly due to Enlightenment culture in which that which could not be proven by science and rationality was not taken seriously (2013). These experiential elements of Christianity initially ignored by the historic mainline churches include the belief in and awareness of the presence of witchcraft on the continent, a motif that African Pentecostalism has explored and seeks to counter through prayer and exorcism (Olusakin, 2022). Pentecostalism also embraced Contemporary Christian Music more readily than the older Christian traditions, since it agrees with their extant practice of spontaneous liturgy and expressionism in worship (Asanga, 2020).

3.0 Speaking in Tongues and Spirit Baptism

The expression "baptized in the Holy Spirit" occurs twice in the book of Acts. Its first use by Jesus is in Acts 1:4-5; the other is found in Acts 11:16. Here Peter declared, "Then I remembered what the Lord had said: 'John baptized with water, but you will be baptized with the Holy Spirit.'" Peter was recalling the Caesareans–the Roman centurion Cornelius, his relatives, and close friends–who previously had been baptized in the Holy Spirit (Acts 10:44-46). Pentecostals view the Caesarean narrative as further evidence that Spirit baptism is not limited to the event of Pentecost but continues through the years. Outside the book of Acts there is one possible reference to Spirit baptism. According to Paul, "we were all baptized by one Spirit into one body" (1 Cor.12:13). However, Pentecostals generally do not identify this baptism with baptism in the Spirit (Chen, 2017).

Hence, from the Pentecostal viewpoint, we must look to Acts for an adequate understanding of baptism in the Spirit. Pentecostals often emphasize that to be baptized in the Holy Spirit is to be immersed in the Holy Spirit. This signifies a total submergence within the reality of the Holy Spirit so that whoever is so baptized has a vivid sense of the Spirit's presence and power.

There are three major points of departure between the Pentecostals and mainline denominations:

i. The issue of baptism in the Holy Spirit as a separate experience in the life of the believer (that is, the Spirit's empowerment as 'subsequent' to conversion) as against the Reformed belief in the experience as one that is consequent upon conversion; hence the terms "consequence" and "subsequence". To this, Brumback, quoted in Dunn (1998:85) adds, "As might be expected, some Pentecostals, taking up Torrey's distinction, came to believe that there are *three* distinct experiences and stages: regeneration, sanctification, and Spirit-baptism".

ii. "That speaking in tongues, as in Acts 2:4, is the necessary and inevitable evidence of "the baptism"" (Dunn, 1998:85).

iii. "That the spiritual gifts listed in I Cor. 12:8-10 may and should be manifested when Pentecostal Christians meet for worship" (Dunn, 1998: 85,86).

It is necessary to note that the modern use of the term "Baptism in the Holy Spirit" is attributed to John Fletcher, since he was the first to call John Wesley's doctrine of 'second blessing' a 'baptism in the Holy Spirit' which brought power as well as cleansing (Fahy, 1998). The Pentecostal's belief in baptism in the Holy Spirit can also be traced to that of the Roman Catholic. While the latter views it as a sacerdotal rite to be imparted by a Bishop, however, the former believes it is a crisis experience in the life of a believer, initiated by the Holy Spirit.

The debate on the timing of the baptism in the Holy Spirit is an ongoing one, but the Pentecostals maintain that it is a definite experience subsequent to conversion. This understanding is critical for this study, as it determines, to a large extent, one's view of the glossolalic experience.

4.0 Evolution of Methodist Church Nigeria, Archdiocese of Uyo

Methodist Church Nigeria, Archdiocese of Uyo is a conglomerate of four dioceses, namely: Ikono, Uyo, Adadia and Eket. Apart from Diocese of Ikono which evolved from the former Diocese of Calabar, the two other Dioceses that make up the Archdiocese were carved out from the former Diocese of Uyo. It was in 2013 that the Dioceses of Uyo, Ikono, Adadia and Eket met and agreed to be constituted into the Archdiocese of Uyo. This was approved by the Archdiocese of Calabar and a request was tabled before Conference of that year which graciously approved the creation of Archdiocese of Uyo with headquarters in Uyo and Most Rev. Emmanuel Udofia as the pioneer Archbishop (Programme for the Celebration of 180 years of Methodism in Nigeria, 2022).

5.0 Influence of Pentecostalism on Speaking in Tongues in Methodist Church Nigeria, Archdiocese of Uyo

In order to ascertain the influence of Pentecostalism on speaking in tongues in the study area, stratified random sampling was used to elicit information from questionnaires. Four hundred (400) copies of questionnaire were administered within Methodist Church Nigeria, Archdiocese of Uyo, comprising of the Dioceses of Uyo, Eket, Ikono and Adadia. However, only Three hundred and fifty-five (355) copies were returned, representing 88.7% of the copies administered. The number returned from each Diocese went thus: one hundred and thirteen (113) from the Diocese of Uyo; ninety six (96) from the Diocese of Ikono; eighty eight (88) from

the Diocese of Eket; and fifty eight (58) from the Diocese of Adadia. The three sections in the questionnaire cover the meaning of Acts 2:1-13, the position of Methodist Church Nigeria on glossolalia, and the practice of glossolalia in the study area. Table 1 shows the results of the data collected.

Table 1

S/N	HYPOTHETICAL QUESTION	AGREE		DISAGREE		TOTAL	
Section I: The Meaning of Acts 2:1-4		F	%	F	%	F	%
1	I have heard of 'speaking in tongues' before	337	94.92	18	5.07	355	100
Section II: The Position of MCN on Glossolalia							
1	Methodist Church Nigeria believes in speaking in tongues	277	78.02	78	21.97	355	100
2	MCN teaches that baptism of the Holy Spirit comes after regeneration	279	78.59	76	21.40	355	100
3	In MCN, all true believers should speak in tongues when they are baptized in the Holy Spirit	132	37.18	223	62.81	355	100
Section III: The Practice of Glossolalia in Methodist Church Nigeria, Archdiocese of Uyo							
1	I speak in tongues	121	34.08	234	65.91	355	100
2	I speak in tongues during private devotion only	59	48.76	62	51.23	121	100
3	I started speaking in tongues in Methodist Church	62	51.23	59	48.76	121	100
4	I speak in tongues whenever I am led by the Spirit to	107	88.42	14	11.57	121	100

5.1 Analysis and Interpretation of Data

From section one, it is seen that 337 of the respondents (94.92%) have heard of speaking in tongues before. This shows that the phenomenon is not altogether alien to them. From section two, 277 of the respondents (78.02%) agree that Methodist Church Nigeria believes in speaking in tongues. It must be noted, however, that the position that the Church believes in speaking in tongues does not necessarily bear an official stamp of the Church as there is no document in which the Church endorsed the practice. The reason for the position, therefore, is that it is widely practiced at the time of the research and the leadership of the Church has not discountenanced it. For instance, Mfon Duke (personal communication, May 23, 2022) recounts:

> On the 15th of May, 2022, at Immanuel Methodist Cathedral, Itiam Etoi, Uyo, the Prelate, His Eminence Dr. Samuel C.K. Uche, while concluding his valedictory tour of the Archdiocese of Uyo (in a thanksgiving service) remarked that MCN Ministers and members were free to speak in tongues and prophesy, and manifest their spiritual gifts.

On the second question in section 2, 279 (78.59%) of the respondents affirmed that Methodist Church Nigeria teaches that baptism of the Holy Spirit comes after regeneration. This shows that the Pentecostal dogma of subsequence which holds that baptism of the Holy Spirit is a separate experience from regeneration now holds sway among the Methodist faithful in the study area. It is necessary to note that although it was John Wesley's doctrine of sanctification as a second work of grace that metamorphosed into the dogma of subsequence, John Wesley himself is not shown to have believed or taught subsequence. The implication of this, therefore, is that the belief in it, now prevalent among the Methodist faithful in the Archdiocese of Uyo, is part of the influence of Pentecostalism.

A point of divergence, however, is seen in the response to question 3 in section 2. The hypothesis is that in Methodist Church Nigeria, all true believers should speak in tongues when they are baptized in the Holy Spirit. Only 132 (37.18%) of the respondents agree. The remaining 223 (63.81%) disagree, thereby maintaining that speaking in tongues is not a compulsory evidence of baptism of the Holy Spirit. One can therefore conclude that the majority of Methodists in the study area

regard speaking in tongues, in line with Paul's classification of spiritual gifts in 1 Corinthians 12, as one of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. This, however, is different from the Pentecostal position that baptism of the Holy Spirit must be followed by the initial evidence of speaking in tongues (Jager, 2019; Adejube, 2020).

Section 3 shows that only 121 (34.08%) out of 355 respondents speak in tongues; the remaining 234(65.91%), that is, more than half of the sample, do not. It was therefore necessary to use the 121 who speak in tongues as the basis for determining the experience of glossolalia within the Archdiocese as it takes one who speaks in tongues to answer the remaining questions within the subsection intelligibly.

From the response to the second question in section 3, a little above half (62, representing 51.23%) of the tongues speaking population, do so both in private and in public. The remaining 59 (48.76%) do so only in private. If about half of the tongues speakers do so only in private, it implies that only the other half express themselves in tongues during worship. One can therefore conclude that those who speak in tongues only in private speak what they regard as a heavenly language and not an existing language in the world. An exception to this is Evelyn Eyo (personal communication, May 22, 2022) who claimed that the Holy Spirit immediately gives her interpretation of her tongues as she speaks. It is not immediately discernible, however, whether those who also speak in public do so as *xenoglossia* (speaking in existing human languages) or glossolalia (speaking in a heavenly language). However, some of the interview respondents give insight to the kind of tongues that is common among those who speak within the Archdiocese. For instance, Esang Bassey (personal communication on July 18, 2022) relates an experience he could not explain. He said that on the day he started speaking in tongues, to him, he was praying in a known language, but the people he was praying with, drew his attention to the fact that they were hearing him speaking in an unknown tongue. The same experience was repeated once when he was praying for certain people to begin to manifest the gifts of the Holy Spirit. To his utter amazement, one of the sisters began to speak in tongues in his hearing, but was still trusting God for the manifestation of the gift of speaking in tongues because, to her, she was praying in their common language. He was the one who

insisted that he was hearing her proclaiming something in a different language entirely.

Concerning the setting in which they started speaking in tongues (question three), 62 of the respondents (51.23%) affirmed that they started speaking in tongues in Methodist Church Nigeria. The remaining 59 (48.76%) started speaking outside Methodist Church. For instance, Theresa Attih (personal communication, May 27, 2022) explained that she was in her room alone with God when the sweet Holy Spirit came in a baptismal measure and she blasted in tongues. Iquo Ekpo (personal communication, July 13, 2022) recounted a similar experience when, during her National Youth Service, she earnestly desired and prayed for the baptism of the Holy Spirit through the encouragement of her roommate who was a member of Christ Embassy. In her own words, the Holy Spirit "came through for her" as she was having devotion in her room one day, and she began to speak in tongues. Evans Uwaoma (personal communication, May 21, 2022) recounted how he started speaking in tongues in a Pentecostal Church where he had joined his master to worship when he was serving as an apprentice. Ndifreke Umoh (personal communication, May 20, 2022) started speaking in tongues during his university days while worshipping with one of the Pentecostal fellowships on campus. In his words, "I saw myself manifesting grace". Ini Enang (personal communication, May 18, 2022) started speaking at a meeting of the Full Gospel Business Men's Fellowship (FGBMF), while Eno Efo (personal communication, May 17, 2022) and Ibele Idante (personal communication, July 12, 2022) started doing so at a Scripture Union meeting. That of Emmanuel Usen was in an interdenominational fellowship called Ukana Born Again Christian Fellowship, while Gideon Oyare (personal communication, July 12, 2022) started speaking in tongues during an Easter convention in his secondary school. He recounts: "I got baptized in the Holy Spirit with the evidence of speaking in tongues in my secondary school days during our school fellowship Easter Convention in 2008. I had been desirous of the experience and praying for it before then. During one of the ministrations, I received the Holy Spirit and saw myself speaking in tongues." Although the above interview respondents started speaking in tongues at different settings, one thing is common with them: apart from Theresa Attih and Iquo Ekpo whose experiences were within the confines of their bedrooms, all the others started speaking in tongues in Pentecostal churches or Pentecostal-affiliated

organizations. For instance, the Full Gospel Business Men's Fellowship (Kanu, 2012) and Scripture Union (Ojo, 2016) are both charismatic renewal movements which are direct offshoots of Pentecostalism. The ratio between those who started speaking in tongues within Methodist Church and those who started doing so outside Methodist Church shows a high rate of diffusion of the practice from other Christian denominations into Methodist Church Nigeria, Archdiocese of Uyo. In fact, the acquisition of the practice from within the Archdiocese by 51.23% of the tongue speakers is also a proof that the atmosphere for its acceptance has been created, whereas it was not so in the past. This is further verified by Ini Enang (personal communication, May 18, 2022) who recounts:

> In the 1960s and 70s, speaking in tongues was not heard in Methodist Church. I remember always going to African Apostolic Church along with some other young people then just to enjoy the ministry of a couple who spoke in tongues (one spoke and the other interpreted) because, though strange to us as Methodists, my spirit agreed totally with it. When it eventually crept into Methodist Church in the late eighties and early nineties, most of the older folks were skeptical and felt that a strange practice had been brought into the Church. Eventually, it has become more and more common even as many of our Ministers do speak in tongues and encourage their members to seek the manifestation of this spiritually rejuvenating gift.

Esang Bassey (personal communication on July 18, 2022) attributes the prevalence of the practice within the old Diocese of Uyo (which is almost the same area now known as Archdiocese of Uyo) in the 1990s to the ministry of the pioneer Bishop of the Diocese, then Rt. Rev. Efiom Ekpenyong who himself spoke in tongues openly and encouraged members to do so. Okon Abia (personal communication on June 13, 2022) corroborates with this view:

> Although I do not speak in tongues myself, I have a positive view about speaking in tongues. I used to be skeptical about it until I met the pioneer Bishop of Uyo, Rt. Rev. Efiom Ekpenyong who himself spoke in tongues and encouraged believers to do so. Because of the regard I had for him as a servant of God, I told myself that, if this great man of God believes in speaking in tongues and has shown

> that it is scriptural, then so should I. However, I have not seen myself speaking in tongues till now. The difference is that I no longer have a skeptical view of it.

So, speaking in tongues, hitherto not tolerated in Methodist Church Nigeria, has now gained so much ground that some Ministers now encourage their members to seek empowerment for it.

According to the response to question four in section 3: "I speak in tongues whenever I am led by the Spirit to", a greater number (107, representing 88.42%) of those who speak in tongues do so only when led by the Holy Spirit. This is consistent with the view of some scholars, including Wogu (2012), that speaking in tongues, comes from the mind of the Holy Spirit and not human volition. In the words of Inyang Idiongette (personal communication, May 20, 2022), "Speaking in tongues must be as the Spirit gives utterance, not by one's initiation". It also directly echoes Acts 2:4 which reports that the disciples spoke as the Spirit gave them utterance. However, it differs from the Pentecostal position that speaking in tongues can be done upon the volition of the believer, that is, anytime one wants to. Many who maintain this position appeal to Paul's statement in 1 Corinthians 14:15 which says, "I will pray in spirit, and I will pray with my understanding also". Such people insist that the "will" there connotes human volition.

5.2 Summary of Data Interpretation

The above data analysis can be summarized as follows:

i. Speaking in tongues is not a strange phenomenon to the Methodist people in the Archdiocese of Uyo. In fact, a greater number of them insist that Methodist Church believes in speaking in tongues.
ii. Most of the respondents believe in baptism of the Holy Spirit as a distinct experience from regeneration. This is an aspect of diffusion of the Pentecostal ethos.
iii. However, they do not believe that speaking in tongues is a compulsory evidence of baptism in the Holy Spirit.
iv. Less than half of the respondents speak in tongues.
v. More than half of those who speak in tongues do so both in private and in public.

vi. A little above half of those who speak in tongues started doing so within a Methodist setting. This goes to show how much the practice has already been accepted in the Methodist Church, bearing in mind that there was nothing like that before the 1980s.

vii. Almost all the respondents who started speaking in tongues outside Methodist Church did so in a Pentecostal setting.

6.0 Conclusion

From the study and the data analyzed, it is rght to conclude that Pentecostalism, partly owing its emergence to the works of John Wesley on the *ordis salutis* (order of salvation), is in turn gradually influencing Methodists in the Archdiocese of Uyo to be charismatic especially in the area of speaking in tongues. The Methodist tradition that evangelized the south-eastern part of Nigeria did not pay much attention to the manifestation of the gifts of the Holy Spirit. In fact, as at the 1980s, the practice of speaking in tongues was not recorded within the study area. However, with the influence of Pentecostalism, two things have happened. First, the consciousness of the need for charismatic Christianity has engendered a welcoming atmosphere for baptism in the Holy Spirit and speaking in tongues within the Methodist Church. Again, many Methodist members keep being influenced by Pentecostal churches and some have even recorded their initiatory experience of speaking in tongues within Pentecostal settings. Moreover, the age range of those who speak in tongues within the study area points to the inevitability of an increasing population of Methodists speaking in tongues in the near future.

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List of Interview Respondents

S/N	Name	Profession	Age	Date Interviewed
1	Theresa Attih	Clergy/Lawyer	61	May 27, 2022
2	Evans Uwaoma	Clergy	43	May 21, 2022
3	Ndifreke Umoh	Clergy	40	May 20, 2022
4	Ini Enang	Medical doctor	69	May 18, 2022
5	Gideon Oyare	Clergy	32	July 12, 2022
6	Evelyn Eyo	Student	28	May 22, 2022
7	Ibele Idante	Clergy/Engineer	42	July 12, 2022
8	Emmanuel Usen	Clergy	43	May 18, 2022
9	Inyang Idiongette	Businessman	48	May 20, 2022
10	Iquo Ekpo	Civil Servant	40	July 13, 2022
11	Mfon Duke	Clergy	45	May 23, 2022
12	Esang Bassey	Retired Permanent Secretary	63	July 18, 2022
13	Okon Abia	Retired Engineer	83	June 12, 2022